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Country note**

Multi-country programme for the Eastern Caribbean

Summary

The Executive Director presents the country note for the multi-country programme of the Eastern Caribbean (covering Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, the British Virgin Islands, Dominica, Grenada, Montserrat, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, and Turks and Caicos) for a programme of cooperation for the period 2003 to 2007.

The situation of children and women

1. The multi-country programme supports three territories and nine nations in the Eastern Caribbean with an aggregate population of 2.5 million. Countries range from fewer than 4,000 persons (Montserrat) to 1.3 million (Trinidad and Tobago). Indigenous populations are found in Suriname and, in smaller proportions, in Dominica and in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. Almost all of the countries have a commendable record of political and social stability and good governance, and have shown, individually and collectively, their commitment to social and human development, and to human rights. All countries score among the top 70 in the Human Development Index, with Barbados leading at rank 31.

- * E/ICEF/2002/2.
- ** An addendum to the present report containing the final country programme recommendation will be submitted to the Executive Board for approval at its second regular session of 2002.



2. Economic disparities are wide: the gross national product (GNP) per capita ranges from \$1,660 in Suriname (1998) to about \$9,000 for Barbados and for Antigua and Barbuda (1999). The proportion of the population living in poverty varies between 8 per cent in Barbados and 60 per cent in Suriname, with the 25-45 per cent of households headed by women, especially vulnerable (Turks and Caicos at 8.8 per cent a much lower exception). The economies are characterized by their small size and vulnerability to economic shocks due to their global market integration. There is a high reliance on tourism, agro-exports such as banana and sugar, and financial services. Vulnerability is manifest in the loss of the preferential trade terms for the Caribbean banana (especially adverse for the Windward Islands), and the tourism fall-off after the 11 September 2001 attacks. The economies are further vulnerable to natural disasters such as hurricanes, floods and volcanoes.

3. Public spending on basic social services is high in absolute and relative terms in most countries, with the strong results noted below. However, these services require high per capita recurrent and capital costs, and their sustainability is challenged by the ongoing departure of professionals, especially due to migration.

4. United Nations agencies in the subregion conducted Common Country Assessment exercises in 1999 and 2000 in Barbados and the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States area (OECS, a nine-nation group), Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago. These found relatively good child survival rates. Under-five mortality and infant mortality range from 13-35 and 12-28, respectively, for every 1,000 live births. Maternal mortality ratios are below 100 per 100,000 live births in all countries. Immunization rates are generally over 90 per cent, except in the interior of Suriname where measles coverage is only 60 per cent due to the remote Amazonian settlements. Severe malnutrition is very rare, and low birth weight is 12 per cent or less in all countries. Exclusive breastfeeding is generally low and inconsistent. Universal free and compulsory primary education is nearly achieved by all countries, but with increasing drop-out and repetition rates and a marked gender performance gap in favour of girls. Access to sanitation and potable water facilities is over 80 per cent in almost all countries. Systems of birth registration function well, except in Suriname, and to a lesser extent in Trinidad and Tobago, and Dominica. Dominica and Suriname attribute low registration to remote locations with indigenous populations. On the whole, Suriname emerges as the country with the greatest challenges due to its vastness, small population and low density, weak infrastructure and communication, and comparatively low GNP per capita.

5. HIV/AIDS has emerged as a major challenge. Transmitted mainly heterosexually, the general infection rate is estimated at around 2 per cent and growing rapidly. Estimates are that 41 per cent of all HIV infections are in the 25 to 34-year-old age group. Adolescents and young adults, especially girls between 15-19 years old, are particularly vulnerable, due in part to early sexual initiation. In some instances, teenage girls outnumber boys 5 to 1 for new infections, and 4.5 to 1 for reported AIDS cases. Infant risk is highest for the estimated 3,000 births to HIV-positive mothers. In response, all Governments are developing or have developed national plans of action in line with the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) regional strategy on HIV/AIDS, with support from the Joint United Nations Programme of HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and the Caribbean Epidemiological Center.

6. Many adolescents and youth have insufficient skills for a smooth transition to responsible adulthood or for coping with certain challenges. A Pan American Health

Organization (PAHO)/World Health Organization study in 2000 revealed that 54.8 per cent of adolescents had their first intercourse at age 10 years or younger; that one fifth of the boys reported drinking alcohol; and that 10.5 per cent of girls and 9.1 per cent of boys had been sexually abused, usually by an adult within the family. Other data support concerns about teen pregnancies (14 to 16 per cent of the total), violence and substance abuse. Opportunities for youth participation in national and community life are limited, in part because adolescent and youth organizations are still weak.

7. All countries have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and all eligible countries are party to Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women (*Belem do Para*). While saluting national accomplishments, the Committee on the Rights of the Child has commented in several cases on the low age of criminal responsibility; the need to abolish corporal punishment; and weaknesses in mechanisms dealing with child abuse, including, inter alia, inadequate reporting systems. Juvenile delinquency and children in conflict with the law are persisting social and social policy problems. Another generalized social policy problem is the outdated family law regimes, such as child support requirements of \$10 per month for children 0-14 years old.

Lessons learned from past cooperation

8. In reply to the challenge of the multi-country setting, the present multi-country programme has clustered countries in three groups according to their socio-economic status and population. This has proved useful for priority setting, strategy selection, and programme implementation and resource allocation. A two-tiered approach with interventions both at regional and national levels has proven effective and will be continued.

9. The close relations with CARICOM and OECS should be enhanced. They facilitate the development and implementation of regional initiatives such as the 1997 Caribbean Plan of Action for Early Childhood Education, Care and Development; the Health and Family Life Education initiative; the Caribbean HIV/AIDS Strategy; and the OECS Law Reform Initiative. Following the regional consensus with national-level adaptation accelerates national ownership and implementation. Likewise, collaboration with the University of the West Indies (UWI) has improved the overall technical quality of the programme and should be strengthened and expanded to other programme areas.

10. Legal reform and policy reviews in compliance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child will continue to be a slow process due to limited resources and capacities. Yet the mid-term review (MTR) of the present multi-country programme noted too that legislation without an instrument and resources for enforcement is powerless to effect change. Limited legal reform has not been adequately supported with the necessary enabling social services. Likewise, the MTR noted that limited capacities and resources in social data systems have hampered monitoring and data-based policy development and advocacy.

11. United Nations coordination is a challenge because of the different office locations and country coverage in the subregion. However, a concerted willingness

by all to realize United Nations reform objectives has minimized logistical obstacles, and sound practices are in place for upcoming cooperation. United Nations theme groups, a main vehicle of cooperation, have been expanded to include bilateral and multilateral donors, civil society groups and Governments. This practice, which increases coordination, ownership and lesson sharing, should be continued.

12. While the "supply" of rights-based programmes has increased, the "demand" has lagged in key areas. There is dissonance between the Convention on the Rights of the Child and public views in, for example, the age of criminal responsibility, and parts of the public are unaware or have vague notions of the Convention. "Supply" must be complemented with a communication component to educate parents, communities and children on children's rights to create the demand for rights, and to facilitate implementation.

13. An evaluation of the present health and family life education (HFLE) programme showed that successful implementation of school-based life skills education programmes (e.g. conflict resolution, leadership, substance abuse, HIV/AIDS) requires strong support from parents and communities. Greater adolescent participation in programme design and implementation increases its relevance and effectiveness, and an expansion beyond the present in-school population to those out-of-school and in informal learning environments is needed to reach other at-risk youths.

Proposed multi-country programme strategy

14. Development of the 2003-2007 multi-country programme was shaped in a series of national and subregional meetings, and during the MTR exercise. These meetings included Governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), youth representatives and external partners (the United Nations, and bilateral and multilateral partners).

15. The multi-country programme is built around the vision of bridging the gap between the politically-accepted children's rights and the reality of societal values and practices. It closely matches the early childhood development (ECD), HIV/AIDS and child protection priorities outlined in the UNICEF medium term strategic plan, and links in some nations to the education and immunization "plus" goals, especially with respect to disparity reduction. It also matches the poverty eradication and HIV/AIDS emphases of the three United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAFs) being prepared in the subregion for completion in December 2001. It will also build on the CARICOM and OECS initiatives such as those noted earlier.

16. The goal of the multi-country programme is to strengthen and support commitments and capacities of individual and collective Governments, civil society, communities and families to promote, protect and fulfil children's and adolescents' rights; meet children's gender responsive basic needs; and expand opportunities and skills for them to reach their full potential. The strategic role of UNICEF in the programme will be to identify and support opportunities to use its networking and mobilization capacities to promote the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and to help Governments and societies sharpen their focus on children's and women's

rights within their existing strong commitments to social development and human rights.

17. Since the countries are not homogeneous, differentiations will be made based on socio-economic status and the situation of children. The multi-country programme will continue two-tiered interventions at regional and national levels. At the regional level, the multi-country programme will strengthen links with CARICOM and OECS, and with UWI to benefit from its credibility and capacity in research, advocacy and technical assistance. At the national level, major partners in addition to Governments will include community-based organizations, child rights committees, and programme committees such as the HFLE Committee and the Caribbean ECD Association. In addition, partnerships will be expanded to more civil society organizations in the context of the Global Movement for Children, in particular to religious organizations.

18. Alliance-building among development partners is assisted by the United Nations theme groups noted earlier. UNICEF also participates in donor groups in education, disaster management, justice and poverty. Partnerships with major bilateral (the United Kingdom Department for International Development, the Canadian International Development Agency, the United States Agency for International Development) and multilateral agencies (the Caribbean Development Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, the European Union, UNAIDS) will be strengthened, especially through consultations and information sharing for greater complementarity and synergy.

19. Major strategies include: (a) creating the conditions for rights to be fulfilled at the government level in policies, programmes and budgets, and at family and community levels in attitudes and practices; (b) creating conditions for implementing children's rights through capacity-building and support to families, children and youth; (c) promoting greater equity and social inclusion through research, legislative and policy reform, and advocacy; and (d) creating an environment of demand for children's rights, and for the accountability of duty bearers within Governments, communities and families. The multi-country programme will give a high priority to HIV/AIDS prevention in the framework of national strategic plans. As cross-cutting issues, HIV/AIDS and gender will be addressed across the programme, within an overall life-cycle approach. The new multi-country programme will have three components.

20. The objective of **ECD** is to ensure that all children are born healthy, and that children 0-8 years old have access to an integrated set of services, including proper care and education. Within the context of the 1997 Caribbean Plan of Action for Early Childhood Education, Care and Development, the programme will work with regional and national counterparts to ensure that integrated ECD is understood and given priority by families, Governments and society. Subregional ECD networks will be strengthened. At the national level, it will ensure that early childhood policies are mentioned; that attention is paid to key developmental phases such as the transition to primary school; that birth registration systems are strengthened, particularly in Dominica, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago; and that children's health, nutrition and cognitive/social/emotional abilities are monitored. Recognizing the family as the primary caregiver and duty bearer, the programme will support training parents and caregivers about proper child-rearing practices and children's rights. Special attention to teen parents will be offered together with the adolescents

and life skills programme. The programme will also expand the skills of health and community workers, and day-care and pre-school staff in life skills, HIV/AIDS, positive stimulation and early disability detection. Mother-to-child HIV transmission will be combated by improving the capacity of health workers to counsel HIV-positive mothers on maternal and child nutrition.

21. The objective of the **adolescents and life skills** programme is to contribute to adolescent knowledge, attitudes and skills, and to help create opportunities for their active participation in societal development. The programme will (a) support the promotion of adolescent-friendly health services (particularly adolescent-friendly information systems on HIV/AIDS); (b) support peer education and counselling; (c) support the elaboration of national policies that promote effective adolescent participation; (d) provide spaces (e.g. student councils, sports clubs) for adolescents to interact constructively with the adult world and to participate in the decision-making on issues that affect them; and (e) continue to promote positive and healthy lifestyles through the CARICOM HFLE programme, which will be expanded and adapted to reach out-of-school children and adolescents. The HFLE programme is a good example of inter-organizational collaboration, both inter-United Nations and United Nations/CARICOM/UWI. It is coordinated by UNICEF and supported by many United Nations agencies, including PAHO, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Development Fund for Women, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and the United Nations Population Fund.

22. The objectives of the **social investment for child protection** programme are to place children's rights at the centre of national — and community-level public policy and decision-making; to cultivate broad societal will for promoting and protecting children's rights; and to strengthen governments' social planning and monitoring efforts. The programme will support research, mobilization and policy development to respect the rights of all children, especially for social inclusion and equity for: (a) poor children and children not reached by basic social services, with a special focus on indigenous populations; (b) children with disabilities; (c) children and families affected by and infected with HIV/AIDS; and (d) those excluded and marginalized due to their gender. The programme will also provide technical assistance to continue legislative and policy reform in compliance with the two Conventions and *Belem do Para*, particularly with regard to family law, juvenile justice and child protection. Simultaneous review and reform of the supportive social services required for effective enforcement of the law will be an integral part of the process. The programme will also support public education on children's rights to create the social demand for reforms; advocate for higher priority for children's rights in governments' policies, programmes and budgets; and support national capacity-building, such as the training of judges and social workers.

23. UNICEF is a member of a well-functioning subregional disaster management coordination mechanism, including Governments and donors. While **emergencies** is not a separate programme, programme funds will be reallocated and new funds raised within consolidated appeals as deemed appropriate and in consultation with Governments and other partners.

24. An Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation Plan will be developed as part of the programming process. Individual project plans will include log-frames and indicators of outputs and outcomes, and will define monitoring responsibilities.

Annual programme reviews will be held which, along with studies and evaluations, will guide improved planning of interventions.

25. **Cross-sectoral costs** include salaries of staff supporting the entire programme, operating costs not attributable to any single programme, and rental and operating expenses for office premises in Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago.

Estimated programme budget

Estimated programme cooperation, 2003-2007^a

(In thousands of United States dollars)

	<i>Regular resources</i>	<i>Other resources</i>	<i>Total</i>
Early childhood development	2 000	1 300	3 300
Adolescents and life skills	2 500	2 000	4 500
Social investment for child protection	1 600	1 400	3 000
Cross-sectoral costs	1 400	300	1 700
Total	7 500	5 000	12 500

^a These are indicative figures only which are subject to change once aggregate financial data are finalized.